INTRODUCTION

About the LGMA

The California Leafy Greens Marketing Agreement (LGMA) is a food safety program that brings farmers together to make lettuce and leafy greens safer. LGMA members produce over 70% of the nation’s lettuce and leafy greens—over 30 billion servings per year. To provide consumers with safe leafy greens, the California LGMA verifies food safety practices, enforces through government audits and requires a commitment to continuous improvement.
LGMA Members

LGMA members are shippers of lettuce and leafy greens. A shipper is the first person to put leafy greens into commerce; in simpler terms, a shipper helps move lettuce and leafy greens from the farm to the grocery store or restaurant.

LGMA members work with farmers, or farm themselves, in three main growing regions in the state of California. The largest growing region is the Central Coast, where farming happens between May and November. This region includes the Salinas Valley—also known as the Nation’s Salad Bowl—Santa Maria, Ventura, and Oxnard. In the Desert growing region, warm winter temperatures allow for farming of leafy greens from November to April. This region includes the Imperial Valley and Coachella.

Last but not least, farms throughout the Central Valley help bridge the production gap between the Coast and the Desert regions each spring and fall.

The LGMA food safety program covers 14 different kinds of leafy greens, including: arugula, baby leaf, butter leaf, cabbage (green, red and savoy), chard, endive, escarole, green leaf, iceberg, kale, red leaf, romaine, spinach, and spring mix.

LGMA members must maintain 100% compliance with the LGMA food safety standards to be certified. The LGMA requires that members correct all findings cited during audits and that preventive measures are in place to protect public health.
2020/2021 Members
Visit lgma.ca.gov for an up-to-date list of certified members

Agro Jal Farms, Inc., Santa Maria
Amigo Farms, Inc., Yuma, AZ
Andrew Smith Co., Spreckels
Anthony Costa and Sons, Soledad
Avina Produce, Inc., Oxnard
Babe Farms, Inc., Santa Maria
Balolian Packing Co., Inc., Fresno
Beachside Produce, LLC, Guadalupe
Bella Vista Produce, Inc., Santa Maria
Bengard Ranch, Inc., Salinas
Benson Farms, LLC, Brawley
Big E Produce, Lompoc
Blanton Produce Co., Salinas
Bonipak Produce Co., Santa Maria
Boskovich Farms, Oxnard
Braga Fresh Family Farms/Braga Fresh Foods, Soledad
C and E Farms, Inc., Salinas
Channel Islands Farm, Inc., Oxnard
Church Bros, LLC/True Leaf Farms, Salinas
Cinagro Farms, Inc., Fillmore
Classic Salads, LLC, Salinas
Coastal Fresh Farms, Westlake Village
Coastline Family Farms, Inc., Salinas
Country Sweet Produce, Inc., Bakersfield
Curation Foods, Inc., Guadalupe
D’Arrigo Bros. Co. of CA, Salinas
Dan Andrews Farms, Bakersfield
Deardorff Family Farms, Oxnard
Dole Fresh Vegetables, Salinas
Duda Farm Fresh Foods, Inc-CA, Salinas
Duran Distributing, Santa Maria
Dynasty Farms, Salinas
EpicVeg, Inc., Lompoc
Ernie Strahm & Sons, Inc., Holtville
Field Fresh Farms, Watsonville
Fisher Ranch Corporation, Blythe
Fresh Choice Marketing, Inc., Oxnard
Fresh Express, Inc., Salinas
Fresh Kist Produce, Nipomo
Fresh Venture Farms, Oxnard
George Amaral Ranches, Inc., Gonzales
Gold Coast Packing Co., Santa Maria
Golden West Vegetables, Inc., Oxnard
Greengate Fresh, LLLP, Salinas
Grimmway Farms, Bakersfield
Harbinger Group, LLC dba Misionero, Salinas
Heritage Farms, LLC, El Centro
Hitchcock Farms, Inc., Salinas
Ippolito International, Salinas
J. Marchini Farms, Le Grand
Jayleaf, LLC, Hollister
Joe Heger Farms, LLC, El Centro
Kenter Canyon Farms, Sun Valley
Lakeside Organic Gardens, LLC, Watsonville
Mainas Farms, LLC, Holtville
Mann Packing Co., Inc., Salinas
Marmolejo Farms, Inc., Oxnard
Mike Abatti Farms, LLC, El Centro
Muranaka Farms, Moorpark
Muzzi Family Farms, Moss Landing
Ocean Mist Farms, Castroville
organicgirl, LLC, Salinas
Pablo’s Produce, Oxnard
Pacific Fresh Produce, Inc., Oxnard
Pacific International Marketing, Salinas
Pajaro Valley Fresh Fruit and Veg Dist., Watsonville
Peter Rabbit Farms/Amazing Coachella, Inc., Coachella
Pismo Oceano Vegetable Exchange, Oceano
Premium Valley Produce, Inc., Scottsdale, AZ
Ratto Bros., Inc., Modesto
Ready Pac Foods, Inc., Irwindale
Royal Rose, LLC, Salinas
Sabor Farms, Salinas
Salad Savoy Corp., Salinas
San Diego Farms, LLC dba Fresh Origins, San Marcos
San Miguel Produce, Oxnard
Santa Barbara Farms, LLC, Lompoc
Seaboard Produce/Variety Marketing, Oxnard
Silva Farms, LLC, Gonzales
Spinaca Farms, Inc., Gilroy
Steinbeck Country Produce, Spreckels
Sun Coast Farms, Santa Maria
Sun Terra Produce Traders, Inc., Newport Beach
Sunsation Farms, Inc., Monterey
Tailey Farms, Inc., Arroyo Grande
Tanimura and Antle Fresh Foods, Inc., Salinas
Taylor Farms, Salinas
The Nunes Co., Inc., Salinas
The Salad Farm, LLC, Salinas
TLC Custom Farming Company, LLC, Yuma, AZ
Vessey and Company, Inc., Holtville
Visionary Vegetables, LLC, Salinas
Western Harvesting, LLC, King City
Zada Fresh Farms, Salinas
Collaborating for Consumers

Since taking the job as CEO of the California LGMA in January, I remain both excited and humbled by the task at hand. Excited because I have assumed responsibility for an ever evolving organization that has done significant work to develop an industry-wide food safety program for leafy greens.

But humble because I clearly recognize the primary role of the LGMA is protecting the consumer and public health by continuously improving the safety of leafy greens, and that challenge feels daunting.

What has struck me in these past months is that my long-standing philosophy of collaboration to move issues forward in a positive way is what is needed now more than ever if we are to achieve the goal of consistently protecting public health.

Fully regaining consumer trust is going to take collaboration from all of us. This includes retailers and foodservice operations who purchase our products, scientists working on our behalf within academia and trade associations so we can better understand risks and find mitigation strategies that make produce safer; and federal regulators whose goal is the same as ours—protecting public health. Although we may not always agree with their actions, we have to work together.

Most important is the support, confidence, and leadership of farmers, shippers, packers, and processors who are at the core of the LGMA. And it isn’t just about participating in the program, adhering to the food safety metrics or complying with government audits. Although these are vitally important, we will need the guidance of individuals whose daily job is all about food safety—mining their knowledge, listening to their ideas, understanding their experiences. People are the key to evolving the LGMA and making it better.

I look forward to working with each of these groups as we work collaboratively to make lettuce and leafy greens safer.
“PEOPLE ARE THE KEY.”
Farmers Overcoming Challenges

This year marks my 12th as a member of the California LGMA Advisory Board. For the past 3 years, I’ve been honored to serve as the Chairman of this impressive group of farmers, handlers, and food safety experts. Establishing the LGMA back in 2007 was challenging, to say the least. I wasn’t a Board member then, but like most leafy green producers, I can assure you I felt the impact of the LGMA and the burden it placed on us as individual companies and farmers.

My company, the Pismo-Oceano Vegetable Exchange, is a grower-owned cooperative made up of 5 farming families of Japanese descent who grow leafy greens and other vegetables on land their families have farmed for generations. As the General Manager, I’m assigned the duty of making sure everyone knows what is required of them as members of the LGMA. It isn’t easy to implement these requirements, to pay for the cost of expanded food safety activities, or to allow auditors onto our fields to govern how we farm. But we know the LGMA is needed, and we’re better for it.

So much has been accomplished since this program was created, and I think sometimes we forget all we’ve done. Farming leafy greens certainly hasn’t gotten any easier since 2007. Particularly in this past year, we’ve faced challenges from labor, to water, to fires, to restricted markets, and rising costs for everything from fuel to cartons. And we haven’t even mentioned repeated outbreaks linked to our products yet.

What I want to say to members of the LGMA today is that I understand the difficulties you struggle with. And I’m with you. In fact, we’re all with you. At its core, the LGMA is a program that brings farmers together to make lettuce and leafy greens safer. Together we will continue our commitment to improving the safety of our product.

Along the way, the LGMA will do everything we can to help. Our staff is working to provide tools and training to help you understand and follow new updated metrics. And we’re working constantly to communicate all that you do to government regulators, retailers and foodservice operations and to consumers.

A safe and healthy product is what we owe our customers, our consumers and our own families who eat what we grow every day. No, it’s not easy. But we’re in this together and that’s why we’ll succeed.
Continued Commitment Through Uncertain Times

Early in 2020, the world reeled with news of COVID-19. Due to an existing culture of food safety in their operations, the growers and employees who make up the leafy greens community were able to quickly adopt new practices to keep workers and food safe through the pandemic.

Responding to Recent Outbreaks

The LGMA programs in California and Arizona launched a comprehensive review process of the LGMA food safety standards. This process involved establishing four subcommittees to focus on food safety areas highlighted in recent FDA outbreak investigations and has already resulted in real change. In 2020, more than 60 changes were made to the food safety standards in the areas of water and harvest equipment sanitation.
Virtual Audits and Concentrated Field Visits

Amidst COVID-19, the California LGMA offered “virtual” audits for the documentation section of our food safety verification program. This gave LGMA members the option to reduce contact with auditors in an office setting. Field audits continued as usual.

Recent outbreaks have highlighted the transition time as one of concern for leafy greens farming. In an effort to protect public health, the California LGMA conducted more audits from September-November to ensure that every member had an audit in that time frame. On average, each LGMA member is audited four times a year, including one unannounced audit.

Collaborating to Protect Consumers

When LGMA CEO Tim York took the helm of the organization in 2021, he focused on collaboration being the key to protecting public health. He shared how providing safe lettuce and leafy greens starts with the leafy greens industry, but also requires effort from produce buyers, regulatory agencies, and scientists. These groups all need to work together to ensure that consumers can trust and enjoy the healthfulness, beauty, and taste of lettuce and leafy greens.

A New Resource All About Lettuce

In Fall of 2020 California LGMA launched Lettuceinfo.org, an evidence-based resource where registered dietitians, professional food writers, and consumers can access facts and get answers about lettuce and leafy greens. On this website, visitors can learn how lettuce and leafy greens are grown, and what farmers are doing to make sure their products are safe. Plus, if there’s ever a problem with the safety of lettuce, this website provides updates and information to help consumers stay safe.
Audits

Audits are how the California LGMA verifies that our members are using the LGMA Food Safety Standards in their growing and harvesting operations. LGMA members are audited more frequently than most certification programs—4 times a year on average. Each member has one unannounced audit each year; scheduled audits happen approximately every 2 months when a company is actively harvesting. All audits are conducted by the California Department of Food and Agriculture, with oversight from the United States Department of Agriculture.

| Member Audits 04/01/2020 - 03/31/2021 |
|-----------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| Scheduled       | 291 |
| Unannounced    | 110 |
| Total          | 401 |

Compliance

The LGMA compliance process is rigorous and unique: LGMA members are required to maintain 100% compliance with the food safety standards. That means every audit citation must be corrected.

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<th>INFRACTIONS</th>
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*Compliance rate is calculated by dividing total citations by total audit checkpoints for each category

Enforcement

The LGMA Compliance Officer reviews every audit, assigns citation levels, and works with government auditors to ensure that every audit citation has been corrected. If a citation is severe, or if smaller citations are not corrected, the Compliance Officer will start the decertification process. Decertification can last from two weeks up to a year and results in lost business, including shipping to Canada and selling to grocery stores and restaurants who require LGMA certification.
A New Approach to Water

The California LGMA Board voted on April 19, 2019, to strengthen food safety standards for water. These updates included specific directives such as no longer allowing the use of untreated surface water for overhead irrigation of leafy greens close to the harvest date. This resulted in over 60 changes to the food safety standards. Audit verification began in 2020 and is reflected in the large number of citations in the area of water use. This is how the LGMA helps farmers make lettuce and leafy greens safer: by identifying issues and working with the entire industry to make improvements.
With the change in leadership at the LGMA and multiple initiatives in place to help prevent future outbreaks, lettuce and leafy greens farmers can expect some substantial and important changes in the very near future.
Standardized Pre-Harvest Testing

In fall 2021, the LGMA Food Safety Standards will require pre-harvest testing of product grown in fields with elevated risk factors such as proximity to animals. The new testing and sampling protocol calls for collecting 60 samples totaling a minimum of 1,500 grams per acre. The testing must be done 4 to 7 days before harvest. If any test comes back positive, members are required to perform root cause analysis to help determine how the field may have been contaminated. The LGMA will provide training tools and other resources to assist members with compliance.

Mitigating Risks on Neighboring Land

Efforts to prevent foodborne illness outbreaks are extending beyond leafy greens farms. Several activities are underway to look at how lands surrounding leafy greens farming may be contributing to contamination of fields. The California Department of Food and Agriculture has created a program known as California Ag Neighbors that brings together farmers and cattle ranchers. This group is compiling information on the different farming activities taking place both in and around leafy greens farms to determine if there are practices that need to be changed or addressed. The Monterey County Farm Bureau and University of California are actively involved in this program, along with leafy greens farmers, wine grape growers, and cattle ranchers.
Longitudinal Study of the Farming Environment

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration has partnered with the California Department of Food and Agriculture, industry members, and researchers, to conduct a comprehensive study of environmental issues present in lettuce growing regions of Central California and the California/Arizona desert. This effort involves sampling and gathering data that may provide answers about how pathogens may be entering leafy greens fields, or about pathogens that exist naturally in the environment. The main goal is to develop solutions that will prevent future outbreaks.

Prioritizing Leafy Greens Research

The Center for Produce Safety has been a great source of research on produce safety since it was established in 2007. The working relationship between the LGMA and CPS is about to get even closer. Moving forward, the LGMA will provide the CPS with a list of its top research priorities so that the CPS can seek researchers to fill knowledge gaps. The LGMA will also be looking to the CPS for information that more directly explains how producers can implement research findings in their operations.

Connecting with Handlers, Growers & Harvesters

To provide a more effective means of interacting with members, the LGMA is creating a new web-based resource. LGMA Connect will serve as a hub for information on required food safety practices, guidance documents, decision-making tools, training opportunities, audit information, and more. The goal is to make it faster and easier to engage with the LGMA. This new resource should be completed and available by the end of 2021.
BOARD & STAFF

LGMA Board & Alternates 2020-2021

BOARD MEMBER

Steve Church
John D’Arrigo
Drew McDonald
Gurmail Mudahar
Kristina Nunes
Ron Ratto
Jan Berk
John Jackson
Dan Sutton
Todd Brendlin
Sharan Lanini
Robert Verloop

ALTERNATES

Tony Alameda
Pete Donlon
Chris Drew
Paul Faurot
Armando Figueroa
Chato Valdez
Nob Furukawa

Mitch Ardantz
Megan Chedwick
Larry Cox

LGMA Staff

Tim York, CEO (Incoming)
Scott Horsfall, CEO (Outgoing)
Greg Komar, Technical Director
April Ward, Communications Director
Amarachi Okemiri, Member Services & Training Director
Connie Quinlan, Program Coordinator
Brooke Palmer, Administrative Assistant